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"THE ONLY WAY"

A Drama

— In —

Three Acts

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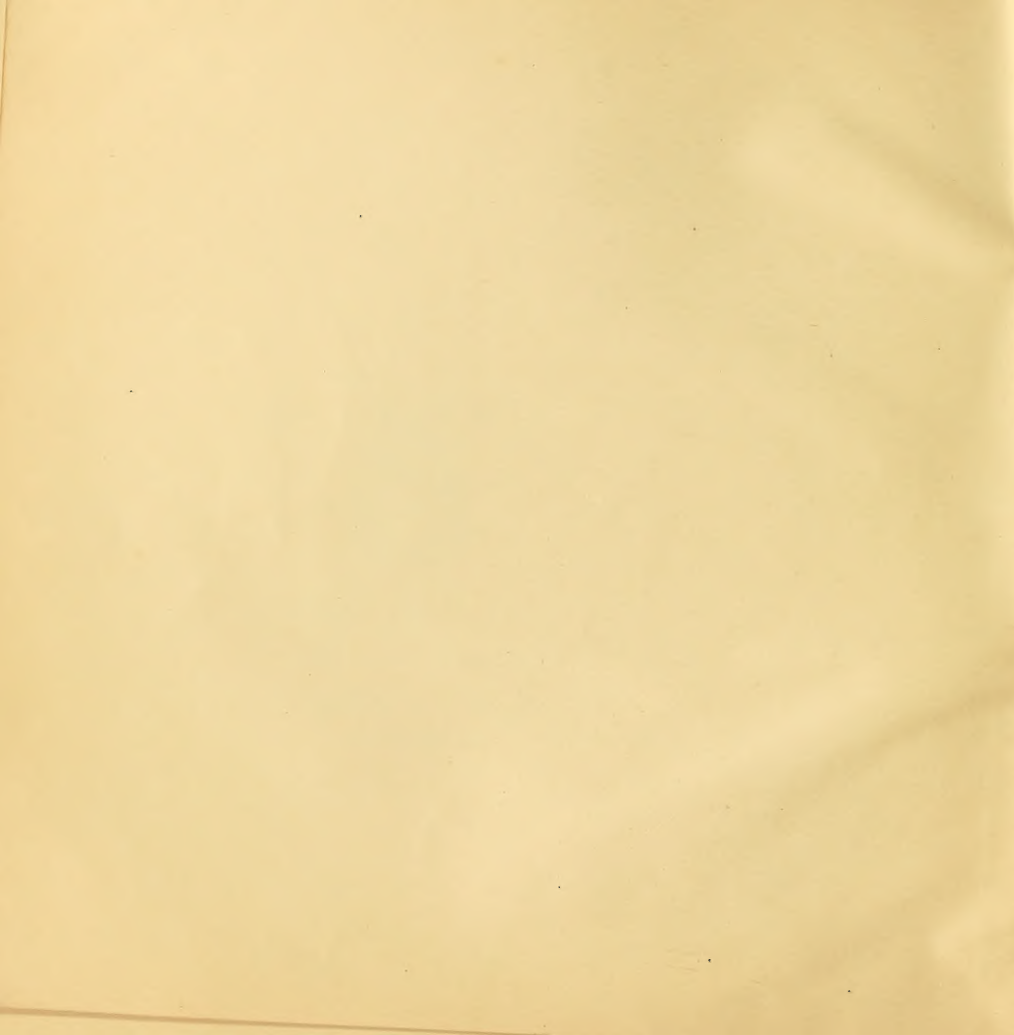


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THE ONLY WAY.
A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS.

CHARACTERS.

Nell.

Myrtle.

Sister Mary Agatha, St. Paul's Orphanage.

Sister Mary Pauline, St. Paul's Orphanage.

Mrs. Hamilton Wilcox—interested in the Orphanage.

Lester Wilcox—her son.

Mr. Pete Murphy—a laborer.

Jane—an orphan.

Policeman on the beat.

Mrs. Jones—a friend of Mrs. Wilcox.

ACT I.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

Room in Orphanage.

8 O'Clock P. M.

The room is large, and gives one the impression of being larger than it is. The walls are white—also the ceiling—with cracks here and there. The woodwork is bright yellow, with dark streaks. A large double door at back center, over which hangs a black cross (no figure on cross). Bay-window in left corner and outside door at left. To right another door and a fireplace. Several holy pictures hang on the walls. In the center is a plain kitchen table containing a Bible and religious papers, pen, ink, etc. Two large express boxes at left of outside door.

CURTAIN RISES.

(Jane is seen arranging Christmas wreaths at window, humming a Christmas tune. She is about fifteen years of age—rather pretty girl—shows the influence of the Sisters in her manner of speech, actions and dress. The clock on the mantel strikes 8. Jane turns.) Eight o'clock, and Sister Mary Pauline and Sister Mary Agatha not back yet. *(She scratches sleek off window to see. It is snowing very hard. Jane peers out.)* I can't see anything. *(She crosses stage and puts a log on the fire.)* They'll be cold. I hope they bring a lot of things for the children—we have so many this year. I guess folks are awful hard up when they can't take care of their own children, and have to leave them on door-steps.

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(The door-bell rings, and Jane rushes to open it.) Sister Mary Agatha! You'll catch your death. *(She shuts the door with effort against the snowstorm.)* Let me take your cape. *(She shakes snow off cape.)* Now go right over to the fire. *(Jane follows, removes the Sister's rubbers.)* Did you bring lots of things?

S. M. A.

(Smiling at her.) See if you can lift the basket. It's quite full.

JANE. . .

(Rushes to basket, which the Sister left at door on entering.) Well, I should say so! *(She sets basket down in front of S. M. A.)*

S. M. A.

My child, we have cause for great thankfulness. Everyone has been good to us, and this year has been the hardest one. So many little mouths to feed!

JANE.

(Patronizing.) Well, how could anybody refuse you anything?

S. M. A.

(Smiling.) It isn't me, my dear; it's——

JANE.

You have more to do with it than you think. Christianity would get along much faster if everyone went at folks like you

do. Oh, isn't this a cute little shirt! Stockings! We need them bad. And if there isn't a red flannel petticoat! It's too bad we can't have a bull-fight; but we can compromise and give it to the one who slobbers the least over the tablecloth.

S. M. A.

(*Ignoring Jane's outburst.*) I stopped by Mrs. Wilcox to wish her a Merry Christmas, and thank her for the box. And what do you suppose? She gave me ten dollars! Besides——

JANE.

She's awful generous, isn't she? You haven't admired the wreaths yet.

S. M. A.

(*Turning.*) They are lovely! When did the boxes come?

JANE.

A little while after you left. Shall I get a hammer? Oh, I nearly forgot. I have a surprise. (*Jane dashes out of room.*)

S. M. A.

(*Warming her hands and feet.*) People are so good to us. I didn't see how we were going to pull through the winter. (*She bends over and takes things out of basket.*) This jelly is just the thing for the infirmity. (*Jane enters with a tray, sets it on the table with ceremony.*) How thoughtful of you. I had forgotten to eat.

JANE.

You always forget about yourself. We had dinner at six, and I knew you'd be out late. Any day you starve while I'm around! I cooked everything myself.

S. M. A.

You did? Well, I'm proud of you. Quite a little cook.

JANE.

(*Bustles herself around table.*) Thank you. I think we're going to have the best Christmas we ever had.

S. M. A.

I hope so.

JANE.

The tree came. It's ever so much bigger than the one they sent last year. And we have lots of things left over to trim it with. (*The door-bell rings.*)

S. M. A.

That must be Sister Mary Pauline.

JANE.

(*Rushes to door—opens.*) It's Mr. Murphy. Come in quick! (*She shivers.*)

MR. M.

Thank ye, miss. Wait till I wipe me feet. (*Enters.*) Good evening, Sister. Don't get up fer the loikes of me—don't get up!

S. M. A.

I just came in, myself. Sit down, Mr. Murphy, and have a cup of coffee. It's a terrible night.

MR. M.

Shure and that it is. I came near mistakin' this house for the saloon; but I suddenly remembered that I wasn't drinkin'. If you don't mind I will be glad to jine yez in a sociable cup of coffee.

S. M. A.

Jane made it herself. (*Jane exits for a cup.*)

MR. M.

Now and you don't tell me! Well! Well! She's right handy about the house. How long has she been with yez?

S. M. A.

Nearly fifteen years. When she gets a little older Mrs. Wilcox is going to take her as a maid. It will be very fortunate, for Mrs. Wilcox lives all alone in a large house. She is a very influential person socially, and does so much for us. Her son is in Australia.

MR. M.

(*To Jane, pinching her cheek.*) So you made the coffee yourself.

JANE.

Yes, sir. (*She exits.*)

MR. M.

And it's good, be gorry! Well, how's me little fellow?

S. M. A.

Splendid. He learns very rapidly. Jane taught him to spell one or two words today.

MR. M.

(*Brightening up.*) That so?

S. M. A.

A bright child.

MR. M.

(*Swelling with pride.*) I could hardly wait for the whistles to blow, so I could git me dinner and run over.

S. M. A.

He has been waiting all day for Santa Claus—and papa.

MR. M.

The little darlin'! Don't you think I might spare another dollar towards his keep? Me job's a good one, now—thanks to you—and I'm comfortable.

S. M. A.

That isn't necessary. You're paying as much, if not more, than most. If I were you I'd save up for his education. It won't be long before he will be going to school. He will need all you can spare then.

Mr. M.

Thank you, ma'am. You always give a fellow good advice.

S. M. A.

I try to.

Mr. M.

I brought you a little present. You have been so good to me and my boy. I saw it in the window, and says to meself, says I, "This is just the thing for Sister Mary Agather to see her pretty face in." (*Hands her a roughly-done-up box.*)

S. M. A.

(*Opening it.*) For me? You shouldn't have done it, Mr. Murphy.

Mr. M.

(*Crestfallen.*) Don't you like it?

S. M. A.

(*Trying to conceal her amusement.*) *Holding up a gaudy mirror.* It's beautiful.

Mr. M.

The other way round! When you look in it will you think of Pete Murphy?

S. M. A.

I always think of you. Now I am sure you want to see your boy.

Mr. M.

Indeed I do. I bought him a fine suit of clothes with pockets in the pants.

S. M. A.

(*Going to door with him.*) He will be so pleased. (*Mr. M. exits, S. M. A. looking after him.*) You're a good man, Pete Murphy—a good man.

JANE.

(*Passes out with tray and re-enters.*) Shall we open the express boxes now?

S. M. A.

Yes, dear. Give me the hammer. (*They open boxes.*)

JANE.

(*Pulls out stockings full of colored candies.*) Oh! Oh! May I trim the tree myself? (*The door-bell rings. S. M. A. opens door.*)

POLICEMAN.

(*Enters, carrying bundle.*) More trouble for you, ma'am. Found down street on the doorstep. The folks called me up to come and get it.

S. M. A.

You musn't say that. We always have room for one more.

POLICEMAN.

It's there with the lungs, all right. A real cute little devil. I'd have taken it home with me, only we have five brats already, and goin' on the sixth.

S. M. A.

(*Taking child.*) You poor little stranger, left out in the cold on Christmas Eve. (*Gives it to Jane.*) Ward H. (*Jane exits with it.*) To think that anyone could leave a helpless baby out on a night like this. (*She sits down at table and wivies.*)

POLICEMAN.

(*Handing S. M. A. a slip of paper.*) Would you mind tellin' me yer name?

S. M. A.

Why, no. Sister Mary Agatha.

POLICEMAN.

That's purty. Would you write it down? If it's a girl I'll name her after you.

S. M. A.

Thank you. I am honored. Where do you live?

POLICEMAN.

Over the corner saloon, three flights up. Stop in. The old woman'll be glad to see you.

S. M. A.

(*Gives him a stocking.*) Good night, and a Merry Christmas.

POLICEMAN.

Thanks, ma'am; and the same to you.

S. M. A.

(*Finishes taking things out of box; piles up things on chair; opens door at back, and is about to enter.*)

VOICE FROM OUTSIDE.

Lemme go! I tell you, lemme go, damn you!

S. M. A.

(*Rushing and opening door.*) What is the matter?

SISTER MARY PAULINE.

(*Enters, dragging Nell and holding an infant.*) I came just in time.

NELL.

(*Very pretty, but shabby and tough.*) Like hell, you did!

S. M. A.

You take the child up and let me tend to this.

S. M. P.

Call for me if you need me.
(*Nell staggers from weakness and drink.*)

S. M. A.

You are ill, poor girl.

NELL.

Hell! That's nuttin' new.

S. M. A.

Sit down.

NELL.

Naw, I won't! What's yer game? I ain't got all the time in the world. (*She staggers towards table.*)

S. M. A.

(*Very patiently.*) I have no game. Please sit down. Here, by the fire, and warm yourself.

NELL.

Ain't yer? Well, you must be different from the rest of yer bunch.

S. M. A.

I'm going to help you.

NELL.

(*Laughs.*) Well, if yer going to talk let me go.

S. M. A.

Not on a night like this. You will stay here.

NELL.

Watch me.

S. M. A.

Where else would you go?

NELL.

Back to McLaughlin's, where the devil you—

S. M. A.

(Horried.) McLaughlin's!

NELL.

Yer bet yer sweet life! I'm tired walking the streets. He offered me real money. (*Falls back in chair.*) Only he told me I'd have to get rid of the kid. (*S. M. A. gives her a drink of water.*) Thanks, ma'am. Yer ain't got no booze?

S. M. A.

(*Controlling herself.*) This will help you better.
(*Nell drinks and makes a face.*)

S. M. A.

How old are you?

NELL.

Sixteen.

S. M. A.

(*Kindly.*) Where's your husband?

NELL.

None of yer damn business. Say, you ask an awful lot of questions for one of yer size. Ain't got no husband. There, now are yer satisfied?

S. M. A.

(*Kindly.*) And you're going away and leave the only flesh and blood you have——

NELL.

(*Impatient.*) Say, if yer had been sick, and just outer the hospital, and gone through what I have, I guess yer'd be damned glad to get rid of it. Ain't I suffered enough already?

S. M. A.

That's why I want to help you.

NELL.

I don't want nothin' from nobody. Nothin'! (*Starts to rise.*)

S. M. A.

Nell! Stay here tonight. Don't go away without your child. It's Christmas Eve.

NELL.

Christmas Eve or no Christmas Eve, it's all the same to me. I can't lug it around with me, can I? (*Laughs bitterly.*) You can bet yer nut I'll never get into a mess like that again. I'm wise to the game. Say, ain't it tough on us women?

S. M. A.

Yes, the woman suffers always. But I am going to help you. Think of your own mother, Nell. What would she say if she knew you were going away and desert your own child?

NELL.

Ah! She chucked me in the streets, she did. No one ever cared what became of me. No one!

S. M. A.

You're mistaken. God cares, Nell. He wants to help you if you'll only let him.

NELL.

Pshaw! You talk all fine enough. I'm going——

S. M. A.

(*Turns as Jane, with a tray containing a pot of coffee, loaf of bread and cup, etc., enters.*) Wait, here is something to eat.

JANE.

(*Approaches.*) I thought you would be hungry—the little boy was—so I made you some coffee.

NELL.

(*Affected for the first time.*) Thanks. I ain't seen grub fer so long. They nearly starved me out at the hospital. (*Jane cuts the bread for her and Nell eats ravenously.*)

JANE.

When you have finished you can come up and share my room. There are two beds.

NELL.

Naw, yer don't catch me in an outfit like this. Thanks for the grub. *(She rises.)* I gotter git.

Mr. M.

(Who has heard some of the conversation, enters.) That's a perty little boy of yers, ma'am, up sthairs. You ought to see him in his little bed. He almost seemed to know me. Wouldn't let go av me finger. Why, yer ain't goin' without seein' him?

NELL.

(Turns from door.) What yer buttin' in this fer? Ain't it enough to get preached at by her? *(She makes a movement toward the outside door again.)*

Mr. M.

(Realizing the situation.) See here, little girl. I'm not going to preach. I'm givin' you the straight goods. By God, I am! Let me tell you something. Four years ago tonight I came pretty near doin' just what you're about to do. I came home from a spree. Oh, it was a fine spree while it lasted! Me old gal skipped the attic, leavin' our little one behind. She had reason enough, I guess. My ways wasn't so particularly steady in them days. Well, when I found myself alone with the kid, it kinder sobered me. I can thank God every day of my life I didn't leave it. And it's been no easy job, let me tell you. I've gone without food and drink many's the toime to keep him here. It's been a hard fight—but when I come here in the evenings and the little fellow rushes into me arms and kisses me, and puts his little arms around me and calls me "Daddy,"

why I wouldn't give him up for anything in this world. Take my word, you'll never regret it; you'll never regret it.
(*Nell hesitates.*)

S. M. A.

You won't go. You won't go. Tomorrow's Christmas. He's right. Stay here. You'll be happier.
(*Mr. M. opens door. Nell shivers and draws shawl around her.*)

MR. M.

Good-night. You'd better stay; it's a mean night. And a Merry Christmas to you all. Remember, that's a faine little lad ye got, and he's going to grow up some day. (*Exits.*)

NELL.

(*Sits down.*) I don't know what to do.

JANE.

(*Comes in supporting a Christmas tree about four feet tall; it is partly trimmed.*) Isn't it just beautiful? (*Sets it down on floor.*) Won't you help me trim it? The things are in the box.

(*Nell, dazed, picks up a few trinkets. The chapel gong rings, and all of a sudden the organ peals forth, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."*)

S. M. A.

(*Opens center door and draws Nell to her.*) Come, Nell! It's Christmas. Come! (*Nell bursts out crying and enters with her.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

An afternoon in the following April. Mrs. Wilcox's library. The room is furnished elegantly and with refinement. Bookcases occupy wall space. Door at center, hung with rich portieres, and giving a glimpse of the front hall. A large fern stands just outside door. Windows at right with window seats. A high stone fireplace left of door with huge standing brass lamps on either side. Couch, easy chairs, rugs arranged with taste and care. Mrs. Wilcox's coat is laid over couch.

CURTAIN RISES.

(Mrs. Wilcox and Nell are sitting by window at left. Mrs. Wilcox is a woman about 40, very aristocratic; a woman who leads socially by birth and breeding rather than by great wealth. She is dressed elegantly and is leaning toward Nell, who is sewing, with a look of kindness and interest. Nell shows decided improvement to Act I.)

Mrs. W.

You're progressing famously.

NELL.

(Looking up.) Ain't I, though?

Mrs W.

(Correcting her.) Am I not?

NELL.

Excuse me, Mrs. Wilcox. It's kind of hard to remember always, ain't—isn't it? Do you think I'm getting on a little?

Mrs. W.

Oh, yes, indeed! You're getting on wonderfully. You mustn't get discouraged. No one is perfect.

NELL.

I wish I was. I'd like to have you proud of me.

Mrs. W.

I am proud of you, Nell. More than you have any idea of. Ever since you came here in January I have watched you, and I am so proud—and pleased.

NELL.

Are you? Are you? I am so glad. I want to do what's right, always. You have been so kind to me. (*She finishes sewing.*) It's finished. Won't he look swell tonight?

Mrs. W.

(*Shaking her head at Nell's remark.*) Aren't you glad you made it all yourself?

NELL.

You bet!

Mrs. W.

Nell! Nell!

NELL.

Excuse me. I forgot again.

Mrs. W.

After the baptism you must put it away carefully and always keep it.

NELL.

(*Rises, goes over to window.*) Shure, I will. Oh, I am so happy, Mrs. Wilcox! (*She leans her head against window.*) Only a few months ago I was out there. No one cared a whoop what became of me. Even he didn't—long. And now (*she goes over to Mrs. W. and kneels beside her*) it seems like a dream. To have a home and something to live for. I know what Pete meant when he told me to stick to the kid—and I'm going to.

Mrs. W.

That's right, Nell. There's only one way, as I have so often told Lester. Follow it, and you needn't ever fear anyone.

NELL.

He must be awful good, Mrs. Wilcox.

Mrs. W.

(*Enthusiastic.*) I should say not. He's just a healthy, happy boy; full of fun. I have never interfered with his good times. I always encourage him to bring his friends home. They can have anything to drink right here, and play poker or turn the house up side down. Most women would be horrified, but my idea has always been to give him his pleasures at home and let him feel that he can bring his friends here. Then he's not getting into trouble outside.

NELL.

You'll be glad to see him, won't you? He's been away a long time, hasn't he?

Mrs. W.

Almost a year. He's been in Australia on business.

NELL.

I have always been wondering what Tom's mother would do if she knew about me. It's funny. He said his folks were high up, but I ain't heard of them.

Mrs. W.

That's a hard question to answer. Each one knows what they'd do until it comes right home to them—then it's another matter. There's only one way in your case. You're a good girl, and he was to blame. He must stand by you as the father of your child, and his mother should insist on it if she's a Christian woman.

NELL.

Would you—would you make your son do that—in spite of everything?

Mrs. W.

I think I would, if he were in the wrong. Of course, each mother has her son's path planned out for him. She begins that when he's a child and she pictures the woman she is raising him up for. It doesn't always come out the way she wants it to.

(The door-bell rings. Butler opens and ushers in Mrs. Jones—tall, thin, terribly made up and dressed—a fright. She carries a pet dog smothered with a huge bow. She looks Nell over with her languettes. Nell exits.)

Mrs. J.

(*Advancing.*) How do you do, Mrs. Wilcox? This is a pleasure. I wanted to thank you personally for giving your patronage to our open-air fund. It's going to be a great success. (*They sit.*) So that's the unfortunate girl you took into your home. Fido, keep quiet! Does um love um's mother?

Mrs. W.

Yes, Nell is a great comfort.

Mrs. J.

It's just like you, Mrs. Wilcox. You are the most charitable woman in New York, but I can't see how you had the courage, not knowing anything about her family—if she ever had such a thing. Fido, want a bon-bon? Is it nice? I have often thought of adopting a child and giving it a good home, but I'd be so frightened how it would turn out. Heavens! If it should turn out a thief! Oh!

Mrs. W.

One doesn't always know how their own are going to turn out.

Mrs. J.

I half-way agree with you—having no children except Fido. He takes the place quite sufficiently. He understands everything I say to him. I think dogs are so human. They have more sense than some people.

Mrs. W.

I agree with you perfectly.

Mrs. J.

(*Uncomfortably.*) I am so fond of animals. Mr. Jones doesn't care for them. He is actually jealous of Fido. I hear your son is coming home today. Travel is so broadening. Don't you think so? I have been to Joliet, and now my heart's desire is to go to Paris, France. I am just dying to get into some French clothes.

Mrs. W.

Undoubtedly.

Mrs. J.

Well, I just happened in to see how you were. Let me give you a piece of advice. Get rid of that girl before your son comes home and avoid—a scene—and scandal which would be gobbled up by the newspapers. The first thing the girl would do would be to cause trouble. You can't trust those people. Think it over.

Mrs. W.

(*Controlling herself.*) I can trust my son, all right.

Mrs. J.

Of course, but look out for her. You know what happened to the Browns. She would be just as liable to make trouble for you. It would be most unfortunate. Mother's lambkin, wave dada to the lady. Isn't he too cunning for words! Good afternoon, Mrs. Wilcox. (*The butler lets her out.*)

Mrs. W.

(*Smiling.*) She means well. (*Goes to the window.*) The carriage is there.

NELL.

(*Enters.*) Oh, you're going to the station. (*Helps her on with her coat.*)

Mrs. W.

Yes; if any messages come please take them.

NELL.

(*Following her out.*) Yes, ma'am. (*Nell goes to window and watches the carriage disappear.*) She'd make her son stand by the woman. No matter what the sacrifice. (*Sits down on seat.*) Well, as I live and breathe if it ain't—yes. (*Nell runs to the door and enters, followed by Myrtle.*)

MYRTLE.

I thought dis was a respectable neighborhood.

NELL.

It is.

MYRTLE.

Swell joint, all right. But what in hell you doin' here?

NELL.

It's just like heaven, Myrtle, compared to the life I led in Franklin Square.

MYRTLE.

(*Looking around.*) I was just roamin' around. Thought I'd see what a respectable j'int looked like. We missed yer down our way. What yer been doin'—since yer went away?

NELL.

He went away.

MYRTLE.

Oh, that's just like a man! Why didn't you dig first? I done that more'n onct. You wouldn't catch no one playin' no dirty tricks on me. There's just as many in the street as them as pass on. May-be you'll get wise, Nell, sometime; you're young yet.

NELL.

(*Comes back from window.*) I couldn't stand it. So I left—went out to Tiffany—worked in a box factory. Then the baby came.

MYRTLE.

You don't mean it? Ain't that the limit!

NELL.

(*Kneels on chair.*) They wanted me back at McLaughlin's, so I took the kid to St. Paul's. They took me in, treated me square, and—I came here to Mrs. Wilcox.

MYRTLE.

McLaughlin's got cleaned out in the raid last week. Say, do you happen to have a drink? I'm dry.

NELL.
Can't I offer you some tea?

MYRTLE.
Tea! With this thirst? Hell!

NELL.
I've cut out the booze.

MYRTLE.
You're welcome to it.

NELL.
So McLaughlin's is cleaned up. Where are you now?

MYRTLE.
Oh, I hang out at any old place where there's anything doin'.

NELL.
Why don't you cut it out and get a job?

MYRTLE.
No, yer don't. Just 'cause you happened to strike a easy snap
yer needn't get so damned patronizing.

NELL.
I'm not patronizing. I'm just telling you the truth. That life
is all a mistake. There's only one straight way.

MYRTLE.

Oh, I was straight enough when I was married. The old man got nifty at throwin' furniture and drink so I quit. My ways may not suit you, but they suit me. Gee! This is a swell joint. Good things come high, don't they?

NELL.

(*Rises and goes over to Myrtle.*) I'll help you to get on. You come tonight to St. Paul's. My boy is going to be baptized. I want you to see him—looks just like Tom. Sister Mary Agatha will give you a bed and cats and keep you till you have work. Will you come? You needn't stay if you don't want to, but I want you to see my boy. You won't refuse that.

MYRTLE.

Well, I may; but don't count on me.

NELL.

See, here's the little dress I made for him, all myself.

MYRTLE.

(*They rise.*) I had a kid onct. I never knew what became of him.

NELL.

Don't you long for him?

MYRTLE.

Sometimes, when I'm sober; but I ain't sober long if I can help it. I wonder where he is?

NELL.

I wouldn't give up my boy for anything in the world.

MYRTLE.

Yer changed. When I knew yer it was whoop it up all the time.

NELL.

I have something to live for now.

MYRTLE.

(*Starts out.*) So long, I must be off! Is there a saloon this way? I ain't passed one comin'.

NELL.

Cut out the booze.

MYRTLE.

Aw, shut yer face!

NELL.

(*Going out.*) You'll come tonight?

MYRTLE.

Maybe, if I don't pass too many saloons.

NELL.

Say yes, and stick.

(*They exit. Nell comes in, puts chair back, lights the lamps (electric) and pulls down the shades. She goes out. Mrs. W. and Lester come in. Mrs. W. unlocks door with key.*)

LESTER.

It's bully to be home again. (*He sits down and starts to light a cigarette.*)

MRS. W.

(*Radiantly.*) You haven't changed very much.

LESTER.

(*Rising.*) No? And you haven't either. (*Hugs her.*) You're still the best mother in the world. I've had a dandy trip. Business (*aside*)—and other things good—in South America. If it weren't for you I'd have stayed longer. (*Aside.*) She was a pippin!

MRS. W.

Your letters were so interesting I almost felt as though I were there with you.

LESTER.

Really? I was afraid—. Hello, what's this? (*Picks up child's dress.*)

MRS. W.

Oh, that's Nell's!

LESTER.

Nell?

MRS. W.

A little girl I took out of the orphanage. I have grown so fond of her. She has had such a sad life.

LESTER.

(*Aside.*) Nell.
(*Nell appears.*)

Mrs. W.

Nell, dear, this is my son. (*Lester turns. Nell turns pale, staggers. Lester grips a chair. Mrs. W. doesn't see Nell.*) Why, Lester, what's the matter?

LESTER.

I feel dizzy. It's the trip.
(*Mrs. W. rushes out to get some whisky.*)

LESTER.

Nell! You here?

NELL.

(*Controlling herself.*) Tom! Are you Mrs. Wilcox's son?

LESTER.

I am. And what are you doing here?

NELL.

(*Agitated.*) You told me your name was Tom Brown. You're a fine one. You liar!

LESTER.

Did you think I'd give my right name? Say, you're prettier than ever. How's the bunch?

NELL.

Look here, Mrs. Wilcox must never know. She mustn't catch me talking to you.

LESTER.

What's your hurry? Come on, give us a kiss.

NELL.

No, I won't.

LESTER.

You're particular.

NELL.

Yes, I am. I am in Mrs. Wilcox's home.

LESTER.

There are other places.

NELL.

What do you mean?

LESTER.

(*Starts for her.*) We might meet.

NELL.

So you think that, do you? (*She starts out.*)

LESTER.

(*Catching her.*) Not so fast.

NELL.

Let me go.

LESTER.

Not till you've kissed me.

NELL.

Stop! Let me go. Mrs. Wilcox is coming.

Mrs. W.

(*Enters.*) Lester, dear, drink this. You'll feel better.

LESTER.

No, mother. I think I'll go upstairs and rest. (*They go out together. Nell comes forward when they go out and sits down in despair.*)

NELL.

What shall I do? What can I do? It's tough on Mrs. Wilcox. She's been so kind. No, she mustn't know. She mustn't know. (*Hysterically.*) I was too happy here. I had a hunch something 'ud turn up. I can't go back to the old life now, but I can't stay here. Oh, I was so happy! So happy! But I'll go. I'll go. Mrs. Wilcox shan't suffer on my account. I'll go.

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

Orphanage—Same as Act I.

THAT EVENING.

(*Sister Mary A. is seated at center table writing.*)

JANE.

(*Entering.*) Do I look all right?

S. M. A.

(*Looking up.*) Yes, dear. (*She arranges Jane's hair ribbon.*)
There now. Is everything ready?

JANE.

I laid out all the vestments, as you told me to.

S. M. A.

Run across the street and mail this, like a good girl.

(*Jane arranges latch and goes out. S. M. A. exits into room beyond. Jane enters with Mr. Murphy.*)

MR. M.

Well, my foine little lady, I kind o' frightened you, didn't I?

JANE.

Only for a minute.

MR. M.

I'm kind o' early for the big splash. Guess I'll go up and take a look at the kid. (*Exits.*)
(*Jane arranging table. The door-bell rings. Mrs. Wilcox enters.*)

MRS. W.

Good evening. Is Sister Mary Agatha at liberty? I want to see her.

JANE.

Yes, ma'am. I'll call her at once. (*Exits.*)

MRS. W.

(*Sits down, gets up and walks the floor.*) My own son! My own son! After all these years of patience and watchfulness, to think— Oh, I shall go mad!

S. M. A.

(*Enters.*) Good evening, Mrs. Wilcox. Oh! What is the matter?

MRS. W.

(*Distractedly.*) Have you seen Nell?

S. M. A.

No. She hasn't come over yet.

MRS. W.

I am so upset, Sister. This afternoon Lester came home. Nell met him. They must have met before. She must have known him.

S. M. A.

You surely are mistaken, Mrs. Wilcox. Nell never went with anyone but Tom Brown. She told me quite frankly.

Mrs. W.

They both acted queerly. I went out of the room, and I am sure they talked different from newly acquainted people.

S. M. A.

You are overwrought. Nell is a good girl—just ignorant, I know. But if you want she can come back here.

Mrs. W.

She left the house—didn't even stop to take this (*the child's dress*) with her, and Lester left the house, too.

S. M. A.

That is unfortunate. If she comes here I will keep her. Under the circumstances you would want to give her up.

Mrs. W.

That's the trouble. I don't want to give her up. I've grown too fond of her. I don't know what to do. Dinner-time came and Lester hadn't yet returned. She even forgot the dress she made for the baby, so I brought it with me. What if Lester should—
Oh, that's dreadful!

S. M. A.

Nell will surely come here. I shall see her alone. She will confide in me. But I am sure you needn't worry. She has never mentioned your son's name, and said distinctly she hadn't even heard of him. Let's go up and dress the baby, and when she comes I'll see her. (*Exeunt.*)

(*The outside door opens forcibly and Nell rushes in.*)

NELL.

Someone is following me. (*She is terrified.*) He kept close to me all the way up the street. (*Lester thrusts open the door and enters.*) You followed me.

LESTER.

Does look like it, doesn't it? And you led me a merry chase. Gee! It was cold sitting out there in the park. But I made up my mind to follow you. Gee! I never thought you'd come in a house littered up with holy pictures.

NELL.

(*Sneeringly.*) Lester-Wilcox, be careful how you speak of the place that sheltered me after even you—went off and ditched me. You're a fine one! Lead a girl on—I ain't seen the flat yer promised me. Let me tell yer I am done with men if they're like you.

LESTER.

Still got that temper with you. You'll get into trouble some day.

NELL.

Leave this place at once, and don't you dare to show yer face again. You dirty——

LESTER.

Not till you come with me.

NELL.

I will never do that. I'm through with yer and yer low-down bunch.

LESTER.

No? You girls are all alike. If I told you you couldn't come with me I'd need a wet rope to keep you away. But, Nell, I want you and I am going to have you.

NELL.

(*Backs up toward right.*) You've done enough. If it hadn't been for you——

LESTER.

Cut that out! If it hadn't been for me it would have been someone else. I know your kind.

NELL.

Lester, you know better than that. After you left I went away. The baby came——

LESTER.

Nell!

NELL.

Yes, our baby, Lester. I longed for you. Every day I prayed that you would come. We might have been happy in the right way, and I would have forgiven you for all if you had even written. But now it's too late.

LESTER.

Where's the child?

NELL.

Here. Your mother let me come and work for her. I didn't know you were Lester Wilcox. She had no pictures of you. I am going away and you'll never see me again. I want to do what's right by Mrs. Wilcox and she will never know that you are the father of—

(*Mrs. W. and S. M. A. enter. They have heard. S. M. A. beckons to Nell and takes her out.*)

MRS. W.

Lester!

LESTER.

(*Confused.*) Yes, mother. I went out to get a shave. Met some of the fellows. When I got home they told me you came here, so I hurried over.

MRS. W.

I waited dinner for you.

LESTER.

I'm sorry, mother, but you see the fellows got to talking and—the time got away from me.

MRS. W.

Did you ever know Nell?

LESTER.

(*Confused.*) No.

MRS. W.

Are you sure?

LESTER.

Of course! You would hardly expect me to know her.

MRS. W.

You acted strangely this afternoon. She also left the house, and you both were here when I came in.

LESTER.

She was here when I came in. I never knew the girl.

(*Myrtle opens the door and comes in.*)

MYRTLE.

Hello, Tom! When did you come back? Nell said you'd given her the go-by, but I told her there was just as good on the corner as passes. I suppose you came to see yer kid. Nell was tellin' me about him this afternoon. Who's yer friend?

MRS. W.

(*Thunderstruck.*) Tom!

MYRTLE.

Shure! Tom Brown. Don't yer know him? We know him
down our way, all right.
(*Lester is distracted.*)

Mrs. W.

Tom Brown, go in there! (*Lester exits.*) You say his name
is Tom Brown.

MYRTLE.

That's wot. Why, all the guys down our way knows him.

Mrs. W.

And he knows Nell?

MYRTLE.

I guess he does. He brought her to McLaughlin's. Say,
what's this to you, anyway? Nell's too good fer him. He promised
her a flat. Ain't men the limit! And she still loves him. She told
me about the kid. She's on the square, she is. Say, where's the
doin's?

Mrs. W.

(*Distractedly.*) In here.

MYRTLE.

Well, I guess I'll go in. Ain't been in a church since I was
married. (*Exits center.*)
(*Mrs. W. is stunned. Lester comes in and is going away.*)

Mrs. W.

Lester Wilcox, come here!

(The chapel bells ring and S. M. A. enters B, goes to A and throws open the door. Nell enters, carrying the child in her arms. She stops, staggers at the sight of Mrs. W., but goes in. A. Mr. Murphy follows with Jane. The organ plays.)

Mrs. W.

What have you done? You have brought disgrace on your mother, on yourself and on a poor, ignorant girl. That is your child in there being baptized. What are you going to do?

LESTER.

(*Surprised.*) Do? What can I do?

Mrs. W.

What can you do? What ought you to do? you mean. Don't you know?

LESTER.

Can't we make some inducement—some settlement?

Mrs. W.

There is only one inducement you can make.

LESTER.

Mother, please, please don't cry. There must be some way out of this. We can deny——

Mrs. W.

(*Furious.*) Lester Wilcox! I thought you were more of a man than that. Think of that poor girl in there. Think of the child who must go through life bearing no name.

LESTER.

Mother, please! Remember your social position. What will society say?

Mrs. W.

To thunder with society! If you do the right thing what do you care what people say? We all have to pay dearly for our mistakes. Do the right thing by her and I'll stand by you in spite of the world. There is only one thing to do. (*She takes off her wedding ring and hands it to Lester.*)

LESTER.

Do you mean that?

Mrs. W.

That is the only way.

(*Nell comes out. Myrtle and Pete arm in arm.*)

MYRTLE.

Nell, Pete and me are going to patch it up for the kid's sake.

NELL.

I am so glad, and I hope you will be happy. Oh, so happy!

MYRTLE.

I have been lonely, and the music brought it to the surface.



MR. M.

Let's go up and take a peek at the little devil. Good luck to
yer, Nell!

MYRTLE.

Why don't yer and Tom get friendly? (*Myrtle and Pete
exunt.*)

MRS. W.

Nell, dear, come here. (*She takes the child from her and places
it in Lester's arms. Lester looks at it in a dazed way. Nell comes
over and stands by him.*)

LESTER.

(*Raising his eyes.*) Nell! Nell! Come here. Come to me.
(*She kneels.*) I haven't been square with you, Nell, but—I'm going
to be. Will you marry me? Will you?

NELL.

Do you mean that?

LESTER.

I do. Will you marry me?

NELL.

Yes.

(*Lester slips the ring on her finger. Nell helps him put it on.
He puts his arm around her and holds the child, too.*)

FINAL CURTAIN.

END.

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